

Chairman McNutt and members of the House Appropriations Committee:

I am speaking today on behalf of the 10 Montana Area Agencies on Aging. Our role is to promote independence, dignity and health of older adults and those that care for them through advocacy, education, services and volunteer opportunities. Our primary focus is to provide supportive services to our older Montanans so that they can avoid premature and more costly institutional care like a nursing home.

There is still a significant cut to Area Agencies on Aging in the current version of the budget bill. Area Agencies received a One Time Only Appropriation of \$1.5 million/year in the 2007 and 2009 legislative sessions. These appropriations have been critically needed to maintain the very cost-effective services that Area Agencies provide. **Continued state funding is imperative in order to keep community-based services for Montana seniors whole.** Our request of you today is to find a way to keep our funding levels whole by reinstating \$1.5 million/year.

Some of the major services provided by the 10 Area Agencies on Aging and through County Councils on Aging are transportation, Meals on Wheels, personal care, homemaking, case management, respite care for caregivers, senior center support and education on Medicare and Medicaid along with long-term care services, and certified long-term care ombudsmen that ensure resident rights in nursing homes. Many Area Agencies also sponsor National and Community Service Senior Corps programs that include RSVP, Foster Grandparent and Senior Companion Programs.

We are here because older Montanans need us especially in light of the Silver Tsunami our state is facing. By the year 2025 Montana will have the fifth highest per capita older population in the United States. In fact, 58% of the current legislators are over the age 55, with the average age being 55. Therefore, most of you will be at least 70 years old by the year 2025 and I gather most of you have every intention of living at home. With the fastest growing segment of our population being 85 and older, the need for in-home support that is largely non-medical will be critical. These are services that the Area Agencies on Aging and



the Medicaid Waiver programs currently provide and are less expensive than the average cost of nursing home in our state, which is \$60,000 annually.

Most of our clients live alone, live in poverty and are at risk of nursing home placement.

I have also included maps that reflect the percent of the aging population in each county for the year 2015 and 2025. In 2010, the population age 60 and older reached 20% or more in most counties. By the year 2025, 30 percent of the population in nearly three quarters of Montana's counties will be over age 60. In 12 counties, the number of elders will exceed 40 percent of total population.

As you can see this is not the time to reduce funding for our older Montanans and this funding could become a consistent source. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee for your time.

**Testimony submitted by:**

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